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ARTICLE VI.

ON THE

MORALITY OF THE VEDA.

BY

PROF. RUDOLPH ROTH,
OF TÜBINGEN.

TRANSLATED FROM THE AUTHOR'S MANUSCRIPT

BY

WILLIAM D. WHITNEY.

(Read October 14, 1852.)

ON THE

MORALITY OF THE VEDA.

Rev. J. M. MITCHELL, of Bombay, has made a work of mine (*Zur Literatur und Geschichte des Weda*, published at Stuttgart, in 1845), the subject of a special notice, wherein he commends the little volume to the attention of the Asiatic Society in Bombay. This notice is published in the Journal of the Bombay Branch Royal Asiatic Society, No. xi. July, 1847, but has not until recently come to my knowledge.

The author is grateful to Mr. Mitchell for the favorable judgment pronounced upon his work, and feels himself peculiarly rewarded for his labors in this department by the circumstance that their results have met with attention and recognition in India itself. Investigations with respect to Indian antiquity, which reach back to the very limit of the history of the human race, possess nevertheless, even for the present, a direct value. For the development of the Indian people has gone on undisturbed from those early ages until now: it has never been forced from its natural course by foreign influences; the bands have never been wholly severed which connect the latest generations with their remote ancestors; even now, those literary monuments which, originating among this people, conduct us farther back into the past than any other existing works whatever (with the exception, perhaps, of a very small portion of the Hebrew Scriptures), are still regarded as the inspired foundation of the national belief, and are in the hands of those whose business it is to uphold and direct that belief, the priests. Whatever contributes to the understanding of these beginnings, must also aid the comprehension of the present. And when men who combine with the culture of the West an intimate acquaintance with the present condition of India, deem worthy of their particular attention results which we have won from those ancient documents through the means only

of general historical and philological research, the practical value of these results is thereby acknowledged.

But the more highly I value the testimony to the inner truth of purely historical investigations, derived from the fact that they aid in the comprehension of now existing forms of spiritual life in India, so much the more unwillingly would I allow to attach itself to them the reproach of "one-sidedness" which Mr. Mitchell suffers to appear in his remarks.

It is this point which the following exposition is intended to illustrate.

The passages in Mr. Mitchell's notice which I particularly have in mind are the following:

"It will be seen that he [Dr. Roth] contemplates these ancient hymns in a purely literary point of view. It is however interesting and useful to examine them in another light; and when we do so, we are compelled to form a far less favourable estimate of their character. It is true, that the general absence of anthropomorphism from the Vedic notion of divine beings, necessarily excludes many of the worst outrages against morality that shock us in the Purānas, in which the worship of deified heroes and gods assimilated to men, plays so important a part. Still, even in this respect the Vedas are faulty; and in the character of the sacred Rishis—particularly as these are represented in the commentaries on the Vedas—there is much that is morally repulsive. A dialogue is given in which Yama endeavors to seduce his twin-sister Yamunā. The Rishi Vasishta is assailed by the house-dog when about to steal grain. See Colebrooke, *As. Res.*, vol. viii. pp. 401, 402. The warlike and revengeful character of the Rishis will be afterwards noticed. Gross indelicacy (such as in Rosen's *Rig-Veda*, pp. 214, 215) is too common to attract much notice. More portentous is the passage from the *Vrihad Aranyaka*, quoted by Colebrooke *ut supra*, p. 440.

"Enthusiastic antiquarians like our author sometimes dislike such remarks as these. But, even were we permitted to waive the claims of religion and morality, a purely literary estimate of the Vedic hymns would be chargeable with that one-sidedness which the Germans generally pride themselves on shunning." p. 406.

In a similar strain is the conclusion of the notice:

“Along with thorough-going German research, our author seems to possess an almost *Jonesian* ardour and imaginative-ness. He is thus able to impart no small degree of fascination to his views. In his hands the old Vedic hymns, which lie withered and sapless in our collections, like the constituents of a *hortus siccus*, seem to burst afresh into life, and resume whatever of grace or fragrance they originally possessed; so that, when we consider them in a merely literary point of view, we are free to confess that among these faded leaves there lie, potentially, charms we could little have suspected. Many, however, will, we trust, approach the Vedas with yet other feelings; and recognizing in them the most authentic and complete memorial of the human mind's early aberrations from primeval truth, will contemplate them in a far higher than merely esthetical point of view, and be enabled to deduce from those monuments, ‘covered with the hoar of innumerable ages,’ lessons which the human race in all succeeding times, and throughout all lands, will do well to ponder and lay seriously to heart.” p. 410.

It is not difficult for me to transfer myself to the point of view from which Mr. Mitchell has been led to such considerations as these. They are suggested to him by my general estimate of the Indian antiquity, which shows itself plainly enough every where in the work in question, as of a period of freshness and vigor. The discovery of such a nobler period, whose existence not long since was not even suspected (in Colebrooke appears no hint of it), must be an occasion of rejoicing to every one who has recognized even in their errors the high spiritual endowments of the Indian people. The lively exhibition of such an estimate might readily strike disagreeably one who, living among the late posterity of such an ancestry, has to struggle against their weaknesses and vices. He is naturally and unavoidably led to connect the past with the present, to seek in the former the seeds of the errors which flourish luxuriantly in the latter, and to regard him as partial and prejudiced who makes no mention of those errors, or at any rate leaves them in the background. Meanwhile, the author of the notice will readily concede that, in accordance with the purpose had in view in my work, a complete representation of the life of that primitive time was not at all called for: that only brief traits could be given, and that in these it was the

difference of that period from the middle and the modern ages that had claim to be made most prominent. If then the brighter side of the picture was exhibited, it lay in the nature of the undertaking that it should be so.

I will not, however, refuse to respond to the challenge which seems to lie in Mr. Mitchell's words. Not that I mean thereby to acknowledge that a purely historical consideration of antiquity is a partial one, and a waiving of the claims of religion and morality. History has rather under all circumstances an indestructible right of its own, which may be set aside in deference to none other whatever. Just as no astronomer thinks of questioning the mathematical laws which regulate the motions of the heavenly bodies, because to many a biblical commentator, and even to the Catholic Church itself, they may seem irreconcilable with the passage in the tenth chapter of Joshua; so will historically established facts maintain their truth and value, even though they seem to be at variance with a narrowed Christian apprehension of history. As in the former case the apparent contradiction is removed by a better comprehension of the words of Scripture, so here too a correctly understood Christianity will be abundantly strong enough to allow historical truth to maintain itself without and within its limits, and even to make it subservient to its own purposes.

But before I proceed to an exposition of my own view of the moral value of the Indian antiquity, I must briefly reduce to their proper value the instances of moral error which Mr. Mitchell adduces.

The authority upon which they rest is Colebrooke's Essay on the Vedas or Sacred Writings of the Hindûs. There we read: "A very singular passage occurs in another place [of the Rig-Veda] containing a dialogue between Yama and his twin-sister Yamunâ, whom he endeavors to seduce; but his offers are rejected by her with virtuous expostulation." If it be considered that, according to the present conception of the Hindûs, Yama is ruler and judge of departed souls in the other world, from whose hands they receive the reward of their actions upon earth, it will be found highly offensive, that the tradition should make him guilty of an attempt at so gross a crime, and particularly one of so sensual a character. And when once this view is taken, it will seem

doubly scandalous that the presentation of such an occurrence should have been allowed place in a collection of hymns regarded as sacred and inspired.

This judgment, however, will undergo very essential modification when the true state of the case is understood. Colebrooke has here (a thing of rare occurrence in his thorough and careful researches) committed a serious error, and misapprehended not only the text of the hymn itself, but also the commentary upon it. It is not Yama who makes the attempt at seduction, but Yamî (not Yamunâ, as Colebrooke writes it); and her attempt is not to seduce him, but to persuade him to a marriage with her. And the offence which morality takes at the proceeding, assumes almost a comical appearance, when it becomes known who Yama and Yamî properly are. They are, as their names denote, twin brother and sister, and are the first human pair, the originators of the race! As the Hebrew conception closely connected the parents of mankind by making the woman formed from a portion of the body of the man, so by the Indian tradition they are placed in the relationship of twins: this thought is laid by the hymn in question in the mouth of Yamî herself, when she is made to say: "even in the womb the Creator made us for man and wife." A later time, to which these already fading myths were no longer objects of simple direct belief, took offence at the idea of such a union between brother and sister, even though it were only in the tradition of the origin of the human race. And from this moral scruple sprang this hymn, wherein the poet makes Yamî spend all her eloquence upon her brother to induce him to become her husband, but he firmly refuses to commit such a breach of propriety. She pleads with him that the Immortals themselves desire to see posterity from the solitary mortal whom they have created; that their union was ordained by the Creator; that it is not brotherly kindness in him to reject her. But he retorts that men call him guilty who approaches his sister; that the spies of the gods, never resting, go about to take note of all that is done upon earth; that a time may indeed come when brother and sister shall do what their relationship forbids, but that he will not fulfill her wish.

The poet himself, far from giving his sanction to an act of sensuality, has not suffered even the ancient tradition of

the parents of our race to escape his criticising morality. To satisfy the latter he has even rendered himself guilty of tastelessness and absurdity, since he will not allow that union to take place from which the whole human family is to spring. He has not troubled himself as to how the propagation of mankind was to be brought about, so as only the established law of marriage be sacredly maintained.

If a parallel be sought for this case in the province to which Mr. Mitchell would refer the student of antiquity, it may readily be found in the Mosaic history. The account in Genesis passes over in silence the circumstance that the children of Adam and Eve must have lived together in connections which we should now term incestuous. It bestows not a thought thereupon, but simply holds fast to the fact that the race is descended from a single pair. The Indian poet, author of our hymn, scrupled and speculated over the difficulty, and found an awkward solution of it, or, rather, hacked through the knot. It were as little reasonable to reckon this to his credit as to find fault with the Genesis for disregarding the point entirely. From this example, however, may be seen whither we should be led, were we to take the substance of ancient traditions for moral doctrine, and judge of them accordingly.

The case is not far otherwise with the second example quoted, yet here Colebrooke's own words might furnish means for arriving at a better understanding of it. He says: "The legend belonging to the second of these hymns [of the seventh book] is singular: Vasisht'ha, coming at night to the house of Varun'a (with the intention of sleeping there, say some, but as others affirm, with the design of stealing grain to appease his hunger after a fast of three days), was assailed by the house-dog. He uttered this prayer, or incantation, to lay asleep the dog, who was barking at and attempting to bite him." Here then Vasishtha, famed as a model of priestly wisdom and ability, is caught thieving; not indeed by the subject of the theft himself: his dog the saint knew how to bann; but at least by us of an after generation. And who was the sufferer? None other than Varuṇa himself, the highest divinity of the ancient Indian faith, who dwells in everlasting light, surrounded by exalted spirits and the hosts of the blest. What can have been the grain that was to be found in his house? The

answer to that question we leave to the commentators who have invented the awkward story. It is a part of the business of the learned expositors of these ancient hymns, to specify for such of them as contain any thing beside the customary prayers and praises, some particular occasion to which each shall have owed its origin, to produce some story which shall serve as introduction to the hymn itself. Such stories have been manufactured in great numbers (as also the biblical literature of the Old and New Testaments has called out an abundance of such productions), and so many of them as bear relation to the *Rig-Veda* have been gathered into a separate book, the *Brihaddevatâ*. From this work is quoted the story of *Vasishtha's* irruption by night into *Varuṇa's* house, whether for the purpose of seeking a lodging, or of satisfying his hunger: after a fast, as the story adds by way of palliation. In the mass of hymns ascribed by tradition to *Vasishtha*, were found sundry verses for warding off the attack of a dog, and others (which, however, hardly had any original connection with the former), for calling down sleep upon all the members of a household. An attempt must be made to account for the occurrence of these verses in a collection of sacred hymns, and accordingly a story was trumped together, whose effect has been, it appears, to fasten a spot upon the reputation of a sage who lived more than three thousand years ago, among the streams of the *Penjab*.

After these instances, it will probably be deemed unnecessary that farther time be spent upon particulars.

If I exert myself to defend the productions of Indian antiquity against attacks of this character, which are manifestly unjust, I nevertheless shall not at all allow myself to be drawn into becoming their panegyrist. And least of all should I promote an insight into the condition of those early times, were I to assemble after the same fashion an array of instances which should show them to have been possessed of all manner of excellencies and virtues. Such single selected traits may here and there be of service, as striking illustrations of general observations, but can furnish no sure criterion of the moral value of a period or of a literature; even though, as in the cases cited, they relate to prominent individuals. For as a period of noble qualities and a literature of solid worth may exhibit many blemishes,

and yet maintain their fundamental character unobscured, so also the most unworthy age may be prolific of individual instances of moral excellence, which show off only the more brightly against the dark background.

If then we endeavor to gain, from the general impression made upon the reader by the productions of the earliest Indian period, a view of their moral and religious value, it will not indeed be without shadows, yet the light will prevail.

The shadows are the same as rest over all antiquity, and especially over periods so primitive as the one in question. Selfishness and, as its consequence, violence, are characteristics of the life both of individuals and of the community. Nations that are making the first advances in civilization win their position by struggles, by strife with their neighbors, by conflict with Nature. Whoever stands in their way is their enemy, their enemy for the simple reason that he is not of them, and lays claim to possessions, such as houses, cultivated land, pasturage, which it would be agreeable to them to call their own. The hymns of the Veda are full of prayers to the gods for the wealth of others, of imprecations of misfortune upon those of other race; and later we find them trying to rid themselves of their adversaries by incantations. They covet earthly riches, and for its sake they serve the gods, paying them homage and offerings, in order to obtain from them in return still richer gifts, whether in the way of the blessings of fertility, or of booty to be won in battle. "If I, O Indra," says one of the bards, "were master of such wealth as thou, I would be generous to him who praised me, but would bestow nothing upon the wicked: day by day would I give in abundance to him who paid me honor, be he who he might. We have no dearer relative than thou, were it a father even." (vii. 32, 18, 19.) But this selfish disregard of the rights of others, when the means of comfortable subsistence and animal enjoyments are in question, knows how to cover itself with a mantle of religion. For these strangers are despisers of the true faith; they on their part wish selfishly to keep all to themselves, and give the gods nothing: they are enemies of religion and of the gods, and ought to be as hateful to the latter as to their worshippers.

If the Greek styled all foreigners barbarians, and by this appellation expressed a certain degree of contempt for them,

looking upon himself as alone in possession of true dignity and culture, it was his own manifold excellence, his own desert, upon which his pride was based. Not so with the Indian; although he too, as well as the Iranian, had from the earliest times made the same distinction between Arian and non-Arian as the Greek between Hellene and Barbarian. The Arian prided himself, not upon his superiority in respect to social culture, language, and the like—or this at least was not the main element in his self-complacency, for these were advantages which had by no means as yet arrived at full development and appreciation—but rather upon his religion: he boasted that he belonged to a nation who worshipped the true gods, and was by them guided and protected. The national pride of the Greeks was but distantly connected with their religion; with the Arian the two were inseparably united.

He, then, who undertakes to estimate comparatively the morality and religion of antiquity, will be compelled to concede, that the spirit of selfish aggrandizement common to all cultivated nations of the olden time, rests with the Arians at least upon a religious basis; and farther, that they present no other form of an appreciation, an over-appreciation, of themselves than is to be found also among the people of the Old Testament.

If we turn our attention to domestic life, the government of the household, and relations between the sexes, we find occasion neither for special praise nor for special blame. The house is held sacred. The paternal authority is regarded as absolute. Polygamy is not unknown, but evidently of rare occurrence. The wife accompanies her husband to the altar, and so joins him in representing the household there; a later period excludes woman from all participation in sacred things. In sexual matters the ancient Indians do not indeed deserve the praise of continency which the great Roman historian bestows with admiration upon the Germans, but neither do they exhibit that enervating sensuality to which later, in a more southern clime, the nation became enslaved, and which still rests as a curse upon India. The conceptions and the language of antiquity on subjects which later generations have learned to cover up, are blunt and unceremonious; but there is no lustfulness in them: what is natural is simply looked at in a natural way, and the do-

main of modesty is not so far extended as at present. One vice, however, which the Indians share with their brethren who emigrated westward, the Germans, calls here for special mention: the passion, namely, for play, for dicing. References to it are numerous, as well in the oldest hymns as in the later Epic poetry. Recognition of the viciousness of the practice is not however wanting, and the name of gamester is a term of reproach. And, as if by way of warning example, a hymn has been admitted into the most important of the collections, the *Rig-Veda*, containing the complaint of a gambler, who bewails his unhappy passion, depicts its consequences, and confesses that in spite of the best resolutions he has not been able to resist the fatal temptation.

But we shall be best enabled to assign to the ancient Indians that place in the scale of moral culture to which they are entitled, by considering what were their fundamental ideas touching the laws of moral obligation, and the relation of man to the gods. In matters of social life it is not easy to pass sentence upon so remote an antiquity, since we know not the precise rule by which they are to be judged. When, however, the recognition of eternal truths is in point, differences of time and place, of civilization and culture, disappear, and the same laws are in force for the past as for the present.

And here the diverse conceptions of individual divinities are a matter of only secondary importance: under what external forms they are imagined, and how the powers and domains of Nature are shared among them—all this does not affect the grand central point of the relations between the human and the divine. Accordingly, it is seen in all polytheistic religions, that, so soon as thought reaches these innermost provinces of belief, most of the gods, who have hitherto maintained a rank nearly equal, are shaken, and are supplanted, either by a single highest god whose subordinates they become, or by an imperfect conception of a unity of the divine principle. The ancient Indian religion exhibits here a remarkable simplicity and depth. The laws of the moral are as eternal and unchangeable as those of the natural world. The same divine power has established the one and the other. This power is represented by a circle of divinities who may be most pertinently entitled the Gods of Heavenly Light. Human imagination was able to find no

visible thing with which they could be compared, saving the light. They are and are named the Spiritual. One of the old poets strives to give words to his conception of them by saying: "in them is to be discerned neither right nor left, neither before nor behind; they neither wink nor sleep; they penetrate all things: they see through both evil and good; every thing, even the most distant, is near to them; they abhor and punish guilt; sustain and support all that has life."

Of this circle of seven, the sacred number, one, Varuṇa, is highest in rank, representing them all, as it were, comprehending them all in his nature; and accordingly standing unquestionably at the head of all the gods: his name in Greek, in the form *Οὐρανός*, denotes the heaven itself. He therefore, in particular, is described as having fixed the laws by which the universe exists and moves, laws as immovable as if founded on a rock. As he marked out the paths of the heavenly bodies, and gave to every creature its characteristic powers, so he bestowed upon man reason and will, and settled the bounds of the moral world, which may not be transgressed without detection and punishment.

In all religions it may be looked upon as a sign of a moral tendency, if stress be laid upon the omniscience of the divine power. If the will and intention of man are to be made account of, and actions estimated not merely according to their results, the divinity must necessarily possess the attribute of omniscience, in order that he may direct the moral world, and judge according to desert. And this attribute is given to Varuṇa in full measure, and in all distinctness. He is cognizant of all that takes place, between heaven and earth, and beyond their boundaries: the winks of men's eyes are all numbered by him; when two converse in secret together, he is the third who knows all they say (*Atharva* iv. 16); he marks the path of the wind, the flight of the bird; past and future are present to his knowledge. In order to picture this omniscience to the conception, the ancient poets surround him with a train of spirits, who at his command, never resting, never erring, watch the deeds of mortals.

A religion which thus makes its chief divinity look into the secret recesses of the human heart—how could it fail to recognize the nature and the guilt of sin? Sin is a conse-

quence of human weakness as well as of human wickedness, yet, as sin, it is no less punishable in the one case than in the other; and forgiveness is likewise besought of Varuṇa for sins that have been committed in unconsciousness. And more than once we find in these ancient prayers repentant confessions of fault, combined with supplications for its pardon, expressed in the language of simple faith. The guilt of sin is felt as a galling chain, and release from its captivity besought; here as elsewhere, human power can accomplish nothing without divine aid: for of himself man is not master even of the opening and closing of his eyes.

The punishments which await the transgressor are—beside the loss of earthly fortune—sickness and death, and, finally, exclusion from eternal happiness: these are the fetters with which the wicked are bound; powers against which all struggles are vain, which they cannot escape, though they fly to the outermost limits of creation. It is indeed no clearly stated tenet of this religion, that death is the wages of sin in the sense that mortals die simply in consequence of their guilt, and, were it not for the latter, would live forever; yet the idea is often very nearly approached. Immortality is the free gift of divine grace to man.

And here, in order to complete our view of the ancient Indian ideas of a moral government, we must take into account their belief respecting a future state.

According to the most ancient custom, the lifeless body is either given to the fire to consume, or committed to the motherly keeping of Earth, who is invoked to receive him graciously, to wrap him up as a mother wraps her child in her garment, to lie lightly upon him. Her bosom, however, is not the last resting place of the departed: he is himself addressed: "Go forth, go forth, on the ancient paths which our fathers in old times have trod; the two rulers in blissful content, Yama, and god Varuṇa, shalt thou behold." The latter of these two heavenly ones whose sight is promised to the deceased, we already know; the other, Yama, is the proper chief of departed spirits. In him we find the fine combination of ideas, that the first man, the originator of the race here on earth, is also the beginner and head of humanity renewed in another world. He is therefore termed the Assembler of men. The first born of them that slept is become the prince of all the new awakened; as is expressly

said in a certain hymn: "Yama hath first found us a place, a home which is not to be taken from us: whither our fathers of old departed, thither goeth also the way of their posterity."

The body which the deceased is to wear in his other existence, cannot be the same one which the flames have consumed, or the earth covered up: it may not even be one like it, for he is to dwell henceforth in the company of divine spirits, and must be clothed like these to be able to claim a right among them. And the ancient Indian religion, in entire harmony with its conception of the highest gods, and in the feeling of an affinity between the human and the divine spirit, here plainly declares that the deceased, laying off all imperfections, is endowed by the divine hand with a shining spiritual body. Its nature is denoted by the same word used to express the essence of the highest divinities above spoken of; a word that unites in itself the ideas of life-full and spiritual.

The place where these glorified ones are to live, is heaven. In order to show that not merely an outer court of the divine dwellings is set apart for them, the highest heaven, the midst or innermost part of heaven, is expressly spoken of as their seat. This is their place of rest; and its divine splendor is not disfigured by any specification of particular beauties or enjoyments, such as those with which other religions have been wont to adorn the mansions of the blest. There they live immortal, with Yama their chief, and the Fathers who have preceded them thither. There they are happy: the language used to describe their condition is the same with which is denoted the most exalted felicity. A hymn paints this condition in the following words:

Where glory never-fading is—where is the world of heavenly light,
The world of immortality—the everlasting—set me there!
Where Yama reigns, Vivasvat's son—where is the inmost sphere of heaven,
Where those abounding waters flow—O make me but immortal there!
Where there is freedom unrestrained—there in the triple vault of heaven,
Where worlds of brightest glory are—O make me but immortal there!
Where pleasures and enjoyments are—where raptures and abiding bliss,
Where all desires are satisfied—O make me but immortal there!

To the question which the theologian, or rather the mystic, ever longs to solve, and longs in vain, since it lies beyond the reach of his conceptions; the question respecting which our own sacred writings maintain silence: what,

namely, shall be the employment of the blest, in what sphere their activity shall expend itself—to this question ancient Hindû wisdom sought no answer. The certainty of happiness was enough for it.

An employment, indeed, it has found for them, but it is one which, so to speak, lies this side of their felicity. As the gods come to men's sacrifices to receive their prayers, praise, and offerings, so also come with them the departed—the Fathers, as they are customarily called—in the form of invisible spirits, who float about those who still remain behind on earth, and bless and protect them; for in their glorified condition they have received divine powers.

One important defect seems to exhibit itself here: that distinct conceptions are wanting as to the relation in which the morally depraved stand to this condition of happiness, and to the other world in general. Not that I regard it as a fault that no state of eternal misery is set off against this felicity, or deem a series of gradations of happiness a valuable addition to a system of doctrine: such attempts at individualization are rather, wherever they occur, pious fancies; still, it remains a defect, that no definite information is given as to what future awaits those who die in their iniquity, who have not believed in the gods, but rather arrayed themselves in hostility against them and their worshippers.

A doctrine which on other points is so clear, could not possibly make the despisers of the gods partakers of their happiness. They would either have to be, by some miraculous agency, changed from bad to good, or that happiness would cease to be such. And the heavenly world is constantly entitled the world of the well-doing, of the pious. The reprobate, then, are assumed to be excluded from it. But what future is assigned to them?

Two possibilities here present themselves: the one, that after the death of the body the evil still live on for an indefinite time their evil life, in contrast to that of the blest in heaven; the other, that their individuality is extinguished by death.

I did for a time regard the former of these two suppositions as the only admissible one, believing that the departed souls of the wicked were converted into spirits of darkness, after the same manner as in the conceptions of the

Shamans. This would assume that they joined the hosts of demons, who under the name of Rakshas and the like terrify men in the dark, and seek to disturb the service of the gods and the performance of good works, and against whose attacks the pious invoke the aid of the gods of light. Thus they would in another form still continue their former mode of action. I was led to regard this solution of the question as the only possible one, chiefly by the consideration that the supposition of a continued existence of the good, and total extinction of the evil, would imply a difference in the principle of life which animated each, while yet both possess the same human nature.

Yet, at present, this reason seems to me rather correct in point of philosophy than accordant with the spirit of remote antiquity. In ancient times, the identity of human nature in all individuals of the race was not thought of: so much as that appears even in the distinction already mentioned as drawn by every cultivated nation between itself and the barbarians. The recognition of this identity makes its earliest appearance in Hebrew prophecy, shows itself later in Buddhism, and becomes complete in Christianity. We ought not therefore to be surprised, if we do not find this exalted thought among the ancient Indians, twelve or fifteen centuries before Christ.

Passages in the sacred writings, moreover, speak in favor of the second supposition, of the annihilation of the wicked at death. We read there that Varuṇa, the supreme judge of the actions of men here and of their fate hereafter, thrusts those who displease him down into the depth. As their body into the grave, so they themselves sink into a dark abyss; and with that, doubtless, their being is at an end. Herewith accords, too, the already mentioned doctrine that immortality is a free gift from heaven. Whoever fails to receive it, ends his existence when his body dies. Of a hell this religion knows nothing, although the later Indians have imagined for themselves hell and its horrors, after the same manner as other nations.

These conceptions form the basis of the ancient Indian religion. The whole varied world of traditions and myths which has come down to us, is, in comparison with these, something merely superficial, an animation of Nature and her powers, images from the ceremonies of worship, and

the like, the work of a lively fancy. It was not in this picture-world that the religious feeling found its full satisfaction. It is a serious error to believe that the mythology of a Nature-religion exhausts its whole religious contents. The images and traditions are indeed what strike the mind most strongly, form the theme of poets and historians, are pictured by art, and symbolized in the ceremonies of the altar and the temple; yet along with them, and behind them, still deeper thoughts stir the heart of the individual and of the nation. To discern and represent these is seldom attempted, and is no easy task. But it is one that repays the effort, for here, at all periods and among all nations, is brought to light what is purely human, and what we are better able to estimate than the pictorial language of myths, which is conditioned by such various circumstances of time and place.

Such a centre of general religious thought and feeling is presented in the ancient Indian doctrine of the relation of the pious to the gods, of which the chief features are above presented. The same conception forms also the ground-work of the Iranian religion, the record of which has come down to us in the *Zendavesta*, and may—in a less developed form, indeed—have been common to all the tribes of the great Indo-European family, until partially obliterated by distant emigration, intercourse with other nations, and changes in manners and habits of life.

No one will hesitate to allow to these conceptions a positive moral value, and to esteem a literature in which such ideas are expressed. But the Indian nation has not abode by them. It has, indeed, carefully treasured up, and at all times regarded as sacred, the productions of its earliest period; but it has attached the main importance to a worthless supplement, and lost from sight and from knowledge the truly valuable portion. Only once in the whole long course of its later history has it enjoyed a period worthy of being compared with that primitive one: during the first ages, namely, of Buddhism. Those, then, who are called to labor in the wide field of Indian missions may confidently hold up before the people its own antiquity as a model: not in order that it progress no farther than that; but that it may see how its ancestors, in their simplicity, were nearer the purity of truth than their descendants, in their self-satisfied arrogance; and how the former cherished none of those

follies and errors in which they themselves are apparently hoping to find their salvation for now and hereafter.

The student of antiquity, farther, experiences a peculiar satisfaction in the investigation of this era, for the very reason that the moral value of the subject of his studies is not a matter of indifference to him. The charm of primitiveness which surrounds these ancient hymns in a yet higher degree than the immortal poems of Homer, is united with a nobility of diction, a pure and fresh earnestness of thought, which are no longer to be met with in the later literary productions of India. He finds the high spiritual endowments which belong of right to the Indo-European family of nations, and which have placed it foremost in the world's history, still fresh and vigorous in the most eastern branch of that family, and not yet disfigured by the manifold excrescences of peculiar views and customs, which have so deformed the later Indian people, that, were it not for their language, the European would scarcely recognize them for his own kindred.